mastercard foundation

In partnership with

LEAP AFRICA

Associates Program

July - Sept 2026 Issue 01

The SPARK CHRONICLES

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program



Connecting young professionals to the skills, experiences, and networks they need to thrive. Shaping meaningful career pathways.

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From the Mastercard Foundation's Desk

Welcome to the inaugural edition of The Spark Chronicles, the newsletter curated for the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program. This edition arrives at a milestone moment: 2026 marks 20 years of the Mastercard Foundation — two decades of impact built in partnership with organisations across Africa, and in close collaboration with the employers, communities, and young people who have made that impact real.

This first edition marks a celebration of a growing community united by a shared belief - that when young people are matched with opportunity for meaningful work experience, and mentored, they can transform their own futures and contribute to the prosperity of their communities.

You will encounter stories of resilience, ambition, and achievement.

You will meet young people who have embraced opportunities with courage and determination, Mastercard Foundation Associates Program Alumni who continue to progress in their career paths, Host Employers who have invested in nurturing young talent, and partners whose commitment has helped make this work possible.

Together, these stories remind us that lasting impact is created through collaboration and shared purpose.

At the heart of the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program is a commitment to enabling dignified and fulfilling work and inclusion for young people across Africa. While we often measure progress through milestones and outcomes, it is the individual journeys behind those achievements that truly inspire us.

Every placement, promotion, new skill acquired, and career breakthrough represents a step toward a future shaped by possibility and potential.

The Spark Chronicles has been created as a space to capture and celebrate these journeys. It is a platform for learning, connection, and inspiration — one where the voices and experiences of our community take center stage, and where those stories can directly shape how the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program grows and reaches more young people. Through each edition, we hope to highlight not only what we have accomplished together, but also what remains possible when we continue to invest in young people's aspirations.

As you read these pages, I invite you to reflect on the collective impact of this community and the role each of us plays in advancing opportunities for young people. Whether you are an Associate, Alumnus, Host Employer, partner, or supporter, your contribution is helping to build pathways toward meaningful work and lasting change.

If you have a story to share — of a placement that opened unexpected doors, a business idea that took root, a mentor who changed your direction, or a moment that captures what dignified and fulfilling work can mean — we would love to hear from you. We look for stories that are specific, evidence-grounded, and honest about the journey, not just the outcome. Please reach out to associateprogram@leapafrica.org and copy associatesprogram@mastercardfdn.org with your story or nomination.

Thank you for being part of this journey. The Spark Chronicles is published quarterly — the next edition will be with you in the next quarter. We look forward to sharing many more stories of growth, innovation, and impact with you in the editions ahead.

Warm regards,

Carol Hondoga
Director, Transitions
Mastercard Foundation



Carol Hondoga
Director, Transitions
Mastercard Foundation

Partners at a Glance

mastercard foundation

Project Owner

LEAP AFRICA

Central Coordinating Partner

yes YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

Implementing Partner: South Africa

Talenteum

Implementing Partner: Remote Jobs

Talent2Africa

Implementing Partner: Francophone West Africa

Shortlist | Futures

Implementing Partner: East Africa

Jobberman

Implementing Partner: Anglophone West Africa

KPMG

Fund Manager

LifeHikes

Training Partner

LIGHT FOR THE WORLD

Inclusion Partner

DARO DATAWORKS

Learning Partner

Click on each logo to learn more

About the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program

Mastercard Foundation, in partnership with LEAP Africa and other implementing partners, is committed to creating dignified and fulfilling work opportunities for young Africans through the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program. The 12-month paid internship initiative provides practical workplace experience while developing participants' leadership, employability, and entrepreneurship skills, equipping them to contribute meaningfully to Africa's workforce.

Since 2023, more than 1,500 Mastercard Foundation Associates across 22 countries have participated in the Mastercard Foundation Associates program, including 55.05% young women, 6.42% persons with disabilities, refugees, and internally displaced persons.

Who Can Apply:

- Recent graduates with 0–2 years of work experience
- Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program Alumni
- Alumni of Mastercard Foundation programs
- Young people, age 18 to 35, across Africa seeking meaningful early-career experience

Our Commitment to Inclusion

The Mastercard Foundation Associates Program is inclusive and ensures participation from young women, young people with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons.

What Participants Gain



- 12-month internship placement



- Comprehensive early-career skills development programming



- Market-rate compensation for each month of placement



- Mentorship and professional networks



- Career transition support

The Mastercard Foundation Associates Program Journey

1

Recruitment & Selection

Recruitment and selection for the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program begins with applications managed by regional placement partners across Africa.

2

Placement in Internship Roles

Eligible candidates are shortlisted and complete PREP2SOAR, a mandatory job-readiness program that prepares them for employer interviews and strengthens their professional skills and confidence for successful placement. Placement is for a 12-month duration with monthly stipends.

3

Transition Pathways

Mastercard Foundation Associates transition from their 12-month placement into dignified and fulfilling work and sustainable livelihoods through pathways such as full-time employment, entrepreneurship and self-employment, further education and professional development, and access to career opportunities through mentorship and professional networks. Mastercard Foundation maintains an active Alumni community for shared opportunities and networking.







How to Apply

Applicants may apply directly on the **Mastercard Foundation Associates Program** website through the region-specific application links, and they can also apply for remote roles. Roles will be posted on a rolling basis.

Stay connected to opportunities through the **Mastercard Foundation Transitions Community on LinkedIn**, where prospective applicants can access useful guidance and region-specific updates. Turn on notifications to stay informed when new application opportunities become available.

Mastercard Foundation Associates Program Alumni Spotlight

The Mastercard Foundation Associates Program wasn't just a career stepping stone; it was the launchpad for an incredible journey that continues to unfold at Helios Towers Malawi. For a young engineer like myself, the Mastercard Foundation Associates program wasn't just about securing a job; it was about being given a genuine opportunity, a chance to prove and grow within a dynamic industry. It was the "yes" that propelled me into my role as Associate Quality Assurance Engineer, a position where I feel I truly belong and can contribute meaningfully.

Brenda Kamkuzi (Female)

- **Role:** Associate Quality Assurance Engineer
- **Organization:** Helios Towers
- **Country:** Malawi (Southern Africa)



What made the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program so impactful was its holistic approach. It didn't just place me; it equipped me. The curriculum was a carefully constructed bridge, directly connecting the theoretical knowledge with the practical demands of my role at Helios Towers. This wasn't just about learning; it was about being molded and prepared to excel from day one. It gave me the confidence to walk into my new role, not just as someone filling a position, but as someone ready to make a real difference.

The learning didn't stop after placement; in fact, it blossomed. Being part of the Helios Towers team, thanks to the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program, unlocked a wealth of internal training opportunities.

The impact of the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program extended beyond my own career growth; it ignited a passion to pay it forward. Witnessing the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program's transformative power in my own life sparked a desire to create similar opportunities for other fresh graduates. I envision a venture that not only provides a platform but also fosters a supportive community where young talents can connect, learn, and thrive, just as I did. The Mastercard Foundation Associates Program showed me the immense value of structured support, strong networks, and continuous skill development – these are the cornerstones I want to build into my future endeavor.

Looking back, the most valuable takeaway from the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program wasn't just a job; it was the launch of a fulfilling career, the cultivation of a responsible mindset, and the inspiration to empower the next generation of professionals. It was the belief instilled in me that one person, equipped with the right opportunity and support, can indeed make a significant impact. My journey is a testament to the power of such programs, and I hope my story encourages aspiring young professionals to seize every opportunity that comes their way and to always strive to create positive change in the world around them.

Mastercard Foundation Associates Program Alumni Spotlight

After completing the internship, I was fortunate to be offered a full-time position within the organization. I initially continued in my associate role, and over the months, thanks to the experience and confidence I gained, I was promoted to the role of Partnership & Grant Manager. This transition has allowed me to take on more strategic responsibilities, particularly in managing partnerships with medical associations and overseeing communications for international congresses.

Fatima Léonora Baldé (Female)

- **Role:** Partnership & Grant Manager
- **Organization:** Clientelis
- **Country:** Senegal (West Africa)



The Mastercard Foundation Associates Program offered a practical, immersive experience that helped me sharpen both my technical and soft skills. From project coordination to stakeholder engagement, I had the chance to apply what I learned in a real-world setting, which made me stand out when new opportunities within the organization opened up.

While I didn't pursue formal academic programs directly through the initiative, the confidence I built during the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program encouraged me to continue learning on my own. I've started certifications in project management and digital marketing, which were motivated by the responsibilities I took on during my time as a Mastercard Foundation Associate.

The Mastercard Foundation Associates Program gave me the structure and real-life context to apply what I was learning and to identify gaps I wanted to fill. It wasn't so much about formal guidance, but more about the autonomy I had to grow. I also benefited indirectly from observing the journeys of other Mastercard Foundation Associates through group discussions, which helped me make informed decisions about my next steps.

Being in a dynamic work environment and having the space to manage real projects gave me the push to start something of my own. I've started developing a side business focused on digital design and branding services, including Canva-based workshops and digital products. I learned how to identify needs in a market and tailor solutions accordingly — especially through managing partnerships and client expectations. That mindset, combined with time management and design skills I've sharpened over the months, gave me the courage to begin building something sustainable on the side.

During a partner engagement initiative, I was asked to lead communications for a major international congress. It was unexpected, and I had to quickly learn how to manage cross-functional coordination under pressure. It ended up being a turning point, because it showed me that I could lead high-level projects — and do it well. That moment opened the door to my current role. I'm grateful for this opportunity.

Employer's Corner

Organization: L'Arbre de Vie Group



Laure D. Barry, President, L'Arbre de Vie Group



Salimata Sene, Associate, L'Arbre de Vie Group

Bio

L'Arbre de Vie Group is an African social enterprise that showcases Africa's natural resources in premium cosmetics and food products, through four complementary entities: Gold Essence Cosmetics (high-end pharmacy-grade cosmetics), African Beauty Rituals (accessible, authentic skincare), Les Trésors d'Éden (gourmet food products), and Laboratoires Arbre de Vie (R&D, training, private label, distribution). We design and produce cosmetics (hair and body care, fragrances, wellness) and premium gourmet products, combining science, tradition and local African ingredients. Our strength: a structured laboratory, advanced R&D expertise, flexible production capacity, and tailored technical support. We work with individual customers, distributors, pharmacies, spas and businesses, ensuring quality, traceability and socio-economic impact, through a network of 300+ rural women in Senegal.

"As part of the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program (MFAP), we welcomed four young talents: two technical profiles, one administrative and one finance. We particularly valued Talent2Africa's support, especially the clarity of the process, the availability of the teams, and the follow-up with the talents. This initiative is a genuine opportunity for young people to gain hands-on professional experience, while allowing companies to integrate and develop new talent in key roles ahead of potential hiring.

Laure D. Barry, President, L'Arbre de Vie Group

"My name is Salimata Sene, QHSE Technician at Laboratoires Arbre de Vie. Joining the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program was a defining step in my journey. My placement at Laboratoires Arbre de Vie allowed me to put my quality skills into practice in a demanding, formative environment. I gained rigor, autonomy and professional confidence. A human and technical experience I highly recommend.

Salimata Sene, Associate, L'Arbre de Vie Group

Events





Mastercard Foundation Associates at the 2026 Onboarding event, Nigeria

Young professionals participating in the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program have begun a 12-month placement journey aimed at providing them with work experience, mentorship and a pathway into long-term employment. The Mastercard Foundation Associates were onboarded at an event organised by Jobberman in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and LEAP Africa in Lagos Nigeria, on Thursday, August 13, 2026.

The onboarding introduced participants to the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program structure, workplace expectations and the support available to them throughout their placement. Mastercard Foundation Associates were excited to network with fellow young professionals from across the country.

Senior Talent Corps at the Lifehikes Training, Nairobi 2026

LEAP Africa recently coordinated the leadership training for the 10 Senior Talent Corps under the Mastercard Foundation Associates Program, equipping participants with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to deliver more effectively in their roles. Following several weeks of virtual learning through the Life Hikes Foundation Leadership Training, participants came together in Nairobi, Kenya, for an immersive in-person learning experience.

Building on concepts explored during the virtual sessions, the training challenged participants to become more intentional about how they lead, communicate, and facilitate. Through practical exercises, peer learning, and engaging discussions, they strengthened their leadership capacity while exploring tools for effective communication and personal branding.

As the Senior Talent Corps return to their respective roles, they do so with renewed clarity, stronger leadership capabilities, and practical tools to influence change more intentionally.





Upcoming Events

SEP-NOV Call for Applications - Southern Africa



19 NOV Jobberman Ghana SparkCon Event



JAN 2027 All Partners Convening





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Stay Connected!

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